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Tips For Succeeding With Internet Courses

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No Abstract

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Tips for succeeding at Internet courses

Internet-based instruction offers flexibility and convenience, but you may still have reservations about trying this method. It is a very different approach than most of us had in nursing school, and you might fear that you are not computer-literate enough.

In the process of developing Web- based courses for my facility's on-line RN-to-BSN program, I put together this list of tips for nurses considering on-line instruction.

BEFORE YOU REGISTER

Obviously, you will need access to a computer. Having your own desktop or laptop computer allows you the freedom to log on anytime -- a plus for nurses who work unusual hours. You might also be able to borrow a computer from a friend or family member, rent one, or use a public-access computer at a nearby library or school.

Check with the facility offering the course to make sure that the computer you will be using meets its requirements. (An example of typical requirements is shown in Table 1.) You will waste a lot of time and get behind in the course if you register and then find out that your system needs an upgrade before you can participate in the lessons.

Find out if technical support will be available for students enrolled in the course. You need to know, for example, what to do if the provider's server goes down or you get an unfamiliar error message. Will the university have an 800 number you can call, and will it be manned during convenient times? If not, find out how technical support will be available.

Ask if an on-campus orientation to the course is available. Although you do not need to be a computer whiz to do an on-line course (some of our students have successfully completed a Web course without ever having turned on a computer before), a hands-on orientation can be extremely helpful. For example, an orientation session can cover how to access and navigate the course and ask questions on-line. We find that students also appreciate meeting the instructors in this face-to-face encounter, knowing that the rest of the course will be via computer.

Find out how to obtain academic support for course material. Can you conveniently contact the instructor with questions? Will she be easily accessible to you? This option can mean the difference between success and failure because you can easily misinterpret ideas and assignments presented on a computer screen.

Check out other pragmatic considerations. Are tuition costs different for online courses? Some universities may charge a fee for long-distance education. How will you register and obtain your books for the course? Will any on-campus meetings be offered? Do synchronous parts to the class (such as chats) require you to log on during specific times? Clarifying these considerations up front will help you avoid misunderstandings that could interfere with your studies.

DURING THE COURSE

Establish a relationship with the course instructor so you are comfortable seeking guidance and clarification. All of the course management programs have a messaging system. Do not feel you are bothering the instructor if you use it often. Stay in close touch to avoid misunderstandings.

I always provide students with a recommended schedule and due dates for assignments. If your instructor does not provide such a time line, make one yourself and stick with it.

The responsibility for keeping up with lessons and assignments is yours; procrastination is your worst enemy. Some students keep themselves on track by committing to a certain time each day for the course.

Preview submissions before sending them. When you type something in a discussion group, keep in mind how easily it can be misinterpreted: The facial features, gestures, and vocal tones that normally accompany face-to-face encounters will be absent.

Follow good online etiquette and don't type in all capital letters; this is the on-line equivalent of screaming. Save your work to your hard drive or a floppy disk before sending it. Then you will not have to redo it if it gets lost in cyberspace.

AFTER THE COURSE

Provide constructive criticism. What did you like about the course and how could it be improved? Web delivery is still somewhat new and everyone is learning. Your evaluation is a valuable tool toward improvement.

Take another course! After one, you have gotten the hang of it, and there is no limit to what you can learn.